

Captured by darthstormer

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Summary: **S3 Spoilers** "No. Not the American." My theory about the post-credit scene in one-shot form.

Captured

AN: I'm writing this before looking to see if others have come up with the same theory, so I apologize if this is the 10th such post in a row. Maybe I'm just in denial about the ending of the show, but in any case, here is my conspiracy theory in one-shot form.

Hет, не американец

"No. Not the American"

Hopper had lost track of how many times he'd heard those words through the rusty door of his cell. He had picked up bits and pieces of Russian - a word here, a phrase there - not a lot but enough to keep his bearings.

Sometimes, after speaking the phrase, they would open a cell nearby and drag out another prisoner, kicking and screaming. He wasn't sure where they took the others, but unlike him, they never came back. Other times, they would say the words as they walked by, just to keep him on edge. They'd been working hard to break him, for months now, but they didn't know any more than they did the day they dragged him out of the mall.

He still wasn't sure how he'd survived the blast; it was all hazy in his mind. He'd given Joyce a nod to shutdown the machine and blow the thing to pieces, knowing full-well it probably meant his own life. He was at peace with the sacrifice, knowing it meant El would be safe. As Joyce turned the keys, he remembered jumping down from the metal gangway and landing hard on the concrete floor below. There were thick beams supporting the device, and he had ducked behind one in a futile effort to shield himself from the bulk of the blast.

Dr. Alexei had said the last time the machine went critical, it had vaporized everyone in the room, but there was always a chance Murray had mistranslated. As the gears ground to halt behind him, Hopper felt the hairs on his arms stand on end, the whole room charging with electricity. To his right, and much closer to the main

bulk of machinery, he saw several technicians in protective gear, frozen in panic at the growing bolts of electricity, like a horrendous lighting storm. There was a bright flash and a scream of metal as the machine tore itself apart. Then, everything was quiet and still.

He was alive but only just. Most of his stolen uniform had burned away, flesh melted on both arms and across his face. The last thing he could remember, lying crumpled on the cold concrete floor, was Murray racing back out the door with Joyce, dragging her to safety as Soviet soldiers poured in through the control room. He fought the urge to call out, knowing any delay and they would both be captured and none of them would make it out alive. Hopper knew he wasn't going to make it, so it was critical that Joyce did; she had a job to do for him.

They had agreed long ago, if anything ever happened to him, she would take in El and keep her safe. He had always assumed it would be something in the routine dangers of being a cop that would do him in, but however it happened, he knew Joyce would keep her word and give El a safe and stable home.

As he let his eyes close and his mind drift away, he thought about his little girl, and all the things he wished he could have said to her. "Live your life. Explore the world and find your place in it. Love with all your heart. Kiss Mike, if you really must. I love you, El, my sweet, amazing girl."

The Soviet soldiers had found his unconscious body on the floor next to the machine, burned beyond recognition but somehow still clinging to life. Thanks to the uniform - what was left of it - they had assumed he was one of them, and rushed him out as they evacuated the facility through an alternate exit, even as the American troops flooded in through the mall elevator. They had tended to his wounds and nursed him back to health, and they were in Moscow before they realized just who he was.

Since then, he'd been moved through several prisons, each more unpleasant than the last. They wanted to know everything he knew about the machine, the project, how he'd discovered the facility beneath the mall and a thousand other things. He'd been beaten half

to death and nursed back to health, only to be beaten again. His nose had been broken more times than he cared to recall. Most of the time, his face was one big bruise. But still, he hadn't given them anything of value.

He knew Joyce was protecting El back at home - whether home was still Hawkins or somewhere else - and he was determined to protect her at all costs from halfway around the world. He would find his way back to her, to all of them. As long as they kept saying 'Not the American' he had time to plot an escape.

AN: So there it is - my stubborn refusal to accept that Hopper is gone. I don't know if I will take this any further, but just wanted to throw this idea out there. If anyone else wants to run with it, go forth with my blessing and bring Hopper home.